The Finest Translations of Edgar Allan Poe's Two Immortal Masterpieces

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Several years ago, when I first came across the recitation of the Persian translation of *The Raven*, penned and performed by Farzaneh Dorri on YouTube, I experienced a sense of profound pleasure coupled with deep admiration for this monumental achievement. It is a truly masterful translation - one that would compel me to stop whatever I was doing and become entirely all ears. Until then, no notable Persian translation had done proper justice to this poetic masterpiece. I thought to myself that if my own signature were beneath this extraordinary translation, I would lay down my pen with absolute contentment, knowing I had accomplished exactly what needed to be done.

For some time, I compared this translation with the original poem. Through this comparative analysis, I realized that the translation is flawless and impeccable in every aspect. All the literary devices that Edgar Allan Poe deployed in this immortal poem have been seamlessly rendered into Persian, fitting naturally within the target language. The final image of the video clip, which juxtaposes the portrait of Edgar Allan Poe - the creator of the immortal masterpiece *The Raven* - with that of the translator, Farzaneh Dorri, is both striking and fitting. This is because the translator has truly recreated *The Raven* in Persian, capturing Poe’s grand tone and sublime literary style. Moreover, the poem's musicality and intricate rhyme scheme resonate even more strikingly and sonorously in the Persian version than in the original English poem.

Prior to this, *The Raven* had been translated by two celebrated Iranian authors: Sadeq Chubak in the 1970s and Ahmad Mir - Alaei in 1994. With the utmost respect for the name and memory of these two literary titans of Iran, it must be noted that neither succeeded in conveying the latent and overt anxiety and dread that permeate every single stanza of this narrative poem.

Sadeq Chubak translated the poem continuously, rendering the entire work into Persian as one long, uninterrupted piece without independent stanzas. On the other hand, the late Ahmad Mir - Alaei, in his commendable effort to offer a superior rendition to that of Chubak, produced a relatively good word - for - word translation of the poem. However, through this literal approach to the verses of this long poem, he utterly failed to transmit the chilling horror present within its poetic atmosphere. In his attempt to improve upon Chubak's work, he divided the long poem into two major sections: the segment prior to the raven’s entry into the poet's chamber, capturing his apprehensions of an ominous event; and the subsequent segment following the raven’s arrival, which depicts the poet's futile dialogue and inquiries directed at the bird, yielding nothing but a single - word response. Ultimately, utilizing a prose that remains devoid of literary embellishment, Ahmad Mir - Alaei delivered a work better than Sadeq Chubak's, yet it falls short of the sublime beauty inherent in the original masterpiece.

The translator who truly did justice to this immortal masterpiece by Edgar Allan Poe, delivering the poem into Persian with the exact same robust, powerful, and majestic language of Poe - and without making any alterations to its original stylistic framework -

was Farzaneh Dorri. Through her verse translation in 2009, she immortalized Poe the poet within the Persian language. Prior to this, a collection of Edgar Allan Poe's crime stories had been translated into Persian, leaving the younger generation of Iranians to know Poe primarily as a detective and crime fiction writer. However, the publication of this verse translation of *The Raven* highlighted the significance of this great American author in the realm of poetry. She translated this long poem into Persian in exactly eighteen distinct stanzas, just like its English counterpart, maintaining a 99% fidelity to the original text. Farzaneh Dorri has presented her Persian verse translation of *The Raven* in the meter of *Bahr - e Rajaz - e Mosamman - e Salem* - namely, the foot arrangement of '*Mostaf'alon Mostaf'alon Mostaf'alon Mostaf'alon*' - adapted, of course, into Nimaic prosody (*Aruz - e Nimai*). This is a meter well - suited for narrative storytelling, yet it is challenging, heavy, and breathless for the poet. Even Saadi, the master of eloquent speech (*Sheikh - e Ajal*), composed no more than thirteen couplets with four repetitions (per ghazal) in this specific meter. In contrast, Dorri, in her translation of *The Raven*, has versified one hundred and eight couplets in this meter, maintaining seamless syntactic flow. At times, she extends these into remarkably long verses with up to eleven repetitions of the foot - a feat that can challenge any poet.

Moving beyond the poem's musicality, one must note the aesthetic dimension of this translation - namely, its successful transmission of the narrative's dramatic tension into Persian, alongside its poignant depiction of the narrator's melancholic psyche and his gradual descent into madness. The rhythmic and melodic integration of the words 'Nevermore' (*Degar, Hargez*), and the way this refrain amplifies the young man's agony, grief, and ultimate insanity within a translation completely faithful to the original, are among the most remarkable aspects of this successful rendition. This is precisely the crucial element that is entirely missing from the two previous translations of *The Raven*.

A comparative alignment of these verses with the English text reveals Dorri's superior fidelity to the original source - a quality that is less evident in Mir - Alaei's translation. Here too, the rhythmic dance of words in Dorri's verse translation, coupled with her masterful execution of the rhymes *'Dasht'* and *'Anbasht'*, elevates the aesthetic beauty of the text to a level equal to, if not surpassing, the original English poem.

Another compelling point of interest found when contrasting Ahmad Mir - Alaei's translation with that of Farzaneh Dorri is that Dorri, remaining strictly faithful to Edgar Allan Poe's specific lexical choice, consistently repeats *'Degar, Hargez'* (Nevermore) and integrates it flawlessly into the poetic structure. In contrast, Mir - Alaei employs the phrase *'Digar, Na'* (No more) throughout his entire translation. It must be emphasized here that *'Degar, Hargez'* serves as the absolutely precise and accurate equivalent of 'Nevermore'.

A Theoretical Analysis of Farzaneh Dorri's Translation of *The Raven*

The distinguishing features that elevate Farzaneh Dorri's successful translation of *The Raven*, making it both preeminent and unrivaled compared to other renditions, are numerous. To analyze some of these aspects, a brief review of the fundamental principles of translation and a few key observations are essential.

1. Textual Transfer from the Source Language (English) to the Target Language (Persian)

Lawrence Venuti, the eminent translation theorist, in his celebrated research titled *Translation, Philosophy and Materialism*, rejects the trans - temporal and trans - spatial hypothesis of the translator as a merely neutral agent who transfers a thought from the source language to the target language without exerting any influence on it during the process. Venuti argues that the cultural differences between the author and the translator, along with their temporal distance, inevitably cause the translator's cultural characteristics and their manifestation in the target language to leave an imprint on the themes and content of the original text. Consequently, the translated work is transformed into a new phenomenon - one that is no longer identical to what originally emanated from the author's mind.

With reference to the aforementioned premise, Farzaneh Dorri's translation serves as further evidence of her pioneering mastery in the craft of translation. This is because she has completely domesticated the poem within the target language, yet she has concurrently remained fiercely faithful to the original text without introducing any arbitrary alterations - a feat that Venuti considers exceptionally difficult to achieve.

Dorri's temporal distance from Allan Poe is vast, and she lives in a culture fundamentally different from that of the original author. She is a woman born in a traditional Middle Eastern country, one hundred and fourteen years after Edgar Allan Poe's death. Conversely, Poe was a man born during the foundational stages of the modern literary movement in America - an era when poetry and literature were still the domain of the elite and the intelligentsia, and he himself, as a literary figure, was responsible for discerning quality texts for literary journals. While Poe was a prominent celebrity of his time, Dorri remains marginalized. Nevertheless, none of these aforementioned disparities hindered her ability to execute a precise textual transfer. From the very opening lines of her verse translation, she seamlessly transports the reader into the same chilling atmosphere that the poet of *The Raven* experienced on a winter night in 1846, introducing the reader to the poet's terrifying illusions through verses of profound weight and immense value.

2. Creation of Atmosphere

According to Lawrence Venuti, the translator's responsibility demands that, while possessing a complete mastery over both the source and target languages as well as the subject matter of the translation - thereby striving for an accurate and faithful rendering - they must also emerge as an author engaged in writing a domesticated text for the users of the target language. Writing such a text necessitates transcending the original source and creating a distinct atmosphere from it.

Farzaneh Dorri's translation has thoroughly fulfilled this condition. Right from the first sentence of the poem's second stanza, she refrains from using the name of the month 'December' and deliberately selects *'Dey - mah'* (the winter month of Dey in the Iranian calendar) for her translation. Unlike European translators of Poe, she avoids the word 'diamond' and instead employs *'Dorr'* (meaning pearl) to describe the brilliance of the poet's beloved. This is a highly conscious choice, as *'Dorr'* is a familiar gem in Persian literature, frequently used in classical poetry by Rumi and Saadi of Shiraz. Furthermore, throughout the entire poem, Dorri contents herself with the word *'Tandis'* (bust), whereas Sadeq Chubak and Ahmad Mir - Alaei explicitly refer to the 'Bust of Pallas' in the poet's

room. It appears that Dorri has very deliberately refrained from doing so. Leveraging her deep mastery over the realm of poetry, she deemed the use of *'Tandis'* on its own to be sufficient. In Poe's poem, the crucial element is the location where the raven perches, rather than the specific mythological identity of the bust. Utilizing *'Tandis'* as a standalone word - rather than a compound phrase like 'the Bust of Pallas' - enriches the literary atmosphere of the poem with profound aesthetic beauty in the Persian language.

3. Domestication of Poetry in the Process of Transfer into the Target Language

Lawrence Venuti finds the translation of poetry difficult but not impossible. However, he emphasizes that the completed translation must appear entirely natural to the readers of the target language, leaving no trace of being a translation. The crucial factor in the success of Farzaneh Dorri's translation compared to those of Sadeq Chubak and Ahmad Mir - Alaei lies precisely and undeniably in this very aspect.
In Dorri's translation of Poe's *The Raven*, we encounter a thoroughly domesticated Persian text - a full - fledged poem that possesses all the literary subtleties and poetic beauties. In contrast, the translations of Sadeq Chubak and Ahmad Mir - Alaei present us with a European text merely written with Persian words.

Rendered in verse and adorned with rhetorical devices just like the original text, Dorri's version allows the sentences to sit with grandeur and beauty in the mind. The rhythmic cadence of her diction creates a delightful melody - a melody arising from an innovative and eloquent system that stirs the emotions of both reader and listener, making it possible to memorize parts of the poem after only a few readings.

In the Persian poem presented by Farzaneh Dorri, from the very first lines, the rhythmic structure and musicality of the verse generate a sequential, compelling atmosphere that makes the reader curious to know the rest of the story. On the other hand, in the translations of Sadeq Chubak and Ahmad Mir - Alaei, we confront the cold corpse of an unfamiliar tale, one that leaves us with perhaps no desire to even read to the end.

In Farzaneh Dorri's translation, all the linguistic, poetic, and verbal characteristics are tangibly palpable, becoming exceptionally prominent in certain stanzas of the poem. Consequently, the internal musicality of the words closely accompanies the poetic expression, forging verses that are beautifully rhythmic and imbued with a sublime sensitivity.

Apart from the eloquence of expression and the grammatical beauty of the language, Dorri's translation, in alignment with the original text, is more accurate than Mir - Alaei's rendition.

Farzaneh Dorri's success is not limited to her translation of *The Raven* alone. In her translation of Edgar Allan Poe's poem *Annabel Lee*, she similarly places her reader before a Persian poem in the truest sense of the word; only the name 'Annabel Lee', being a Latinate name, reminds the reader of the poem's original English roots. In translating this poem, she has chosen a colloquial language that harmonizes beautifully with the innocent atmosphere of the verse. Prior to this, no poetry in colloquial language had been seen from Dorri, and it appears that here too, she consciously and deliberately opted for a colloquial register. She set this within the meter of *Bahr - e Sari - e Makshouf* - namely, the

foot arrangement of '*Moftat'alon Moftat'alon Fa'alon*' - adapted, of course, into Nimaic prosody, which is perfectly suited for mythical or legendary narratives. In this translation as well, she has successfully resurrected the rhythmic dance of Edgar Allan Poe's diction, alongside a beautiful display of flawlessly utilized rhymes in Persian.

It has often been said that for a translation to be rendered into verse, it must inevitably depart, to some extent, from the poetry of the source language. However, the comparative alignment of the verses above with the original English text of *Annabel Lee* bears witness to a meticulous, word - for - word translation of this poem, proving the translator's unwavering fidelity to all of the poet's lexical choices and the original sequence of the stanzas.

4. Lexical Constraints and Grammatical Capabilities

For her verse translations, Farzaneh Dorri selects the prosodic system of traditional Persian poetry and harmoniously reconciles its meters with the Nimaic framework. This endeavor necessitates establishing specific collocational relationships among words to achieve a distinct musicality within the poem. For instance, when she selects the meter '*Mostaf'alon Mostaf'alon Mostaf'alon Mostaf'alon*', she must employ specific vocabulary that fits precisely into this metric vessel. Consequently, the inherent difficulty of the translation process is tripled, particularly in a long narrative poem like *The Raven*. Poetic musicality, which exists across almost all languages with language - specific characteristics, not only imparts a unique cadence to a poem but also creates strict lexical constraints. Due to linguistic disparities, these constraints can make the act of translation exceptionally challenging; yet, this is a feat that Farzaneh Dorri has professionally accomplished. Her renditions stand among a very few rare examples of rhythmic and melodic translations in the Persian language.

Moving beyond her two highly successful translations of Edgar Allan Poe, we consistently find her equally successful in recreating other poets and domesticating them into Persian. In her translations of *My Joy*, *To Dreams*, and *The Tramp* by Sergei Yesenin (*Sergej Jesenin*), as well as her successful renderings of Danish poets - including Pia Tafdrup and Tove Ditlevsen - she has skillfully embedded their thoughts within the landscape of Iranian intellect, presenting the Persian reader with successful, domesticated translations. *My Joy* has been rendered into Persian in the *Chahar - Pareh* (quatrain) format with the utmost fidelity to the original Russian text. Furthermore, the poem *The Bond* (*Bondet*) by Pia Tafdrup, which Dorri translated into Persian under the title *Peyvand*, is one of Tafdrup's most intricate poems - one that even Danish readers struggle to fully comprehend. However, a glance at the eloquent and masterly translation that Dorri has delivered of this poem serves as definitive proof of her immense command over the Danish language and, more broadly, her profound understanding of the poetic universe of international poets. The resonance of her writings undoubtedly stems from her literary prowess and extensive knowledge regarding the languages and cultures of both the source and target texts.

After all, in Farzaneh Dorri's work, the most important aspect of translating poetry is bridging cultural and existential meanings. As an Iran - born poet and translator working across Persian, English and Danish, her approach prioritizes the soulful and thematic core of verse over rigid literalism.

She Preservs the voice, by maintaining the emotional pulse and personal integrity of the source poem rather than just matching word - for - word structures. Dorri didn't translate "The Raven" as a prose piece, rather than trying to match the English rhyme and meter. Scholars view her translation a strict poetic rendering, that many critics consider closer to the musicality of Poe's original design.

Professor Hikaru Kitabayashi one of several notable Japanese professionals and researchers, and author known for his work in linguistics, calls this translation a masterpiece. His doctor's degree and 40 years of academic research was concerned with poetic rhythm in Western European languages.
Kitabayashi says, that he does not understand Persian, but he understands poetic rhythm and Dorri's Persian translation of "The Raven" is rhythmic perfection. Moreover, he mentions Dorri's reading is captivating, compelling, something he would have previously thought difficult for a woman to achieve, considering it was written from a man's perspective. He says, that Farzaneh Dorri's work shows that, with intelligence and care, poetry is always capable of transcending intellectual bias; with other words, this is an amazing performance.